

VZCZCXRO8569
PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHTI #0252 0910530
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 310530Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6919
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS TIRANA 000252

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE (ERIN KOTHEIMER)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MK](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: Macedonia's Ahmeti Visits Tirana

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Ali Ahmeti, the Macedonian Chairman of the Democratic Union of Integration (DUI), visited Tirana on March 25, where he was received by Prime Minister Berisha, President Topi, Speaker Topalli and Albania's opposition leaders. Ahmeti expressed solidarity from the Albanian community in Macedonia in the aftermath of the Gerdec tragedy and also discussed internal political developments in Macedonia with Albanian politicians. Albania's political leadership warmly supported Macedonia's NATO aspirations and reiterated Albania's position for a full implementation of the Ohrid agreement. Ahmeti's visit follows an earlier visit of PDSH Chairman Menduh Thaci in March, 2007.

Ahmeti Meets with Prime Minister Berisha

¶2. (SBU) Prime Minister Berisha briefed Ahmeti on the ammunition depot explosion in Gerdec and subsequent government actions to assist victims of the tragedy. During a press conference with Ahmeti, Berisha expressed Albania's gratitude for the solidarity demonstrated by the Macedonian government and ethnic Albanians living in Macedonia. According to sources who attended the meeting between the two delegations, Prime Minister Berisha and DUI Chairman Ahmeti discussed issues related to the implementation of the Ohrid agreement and internal political developments in the Albanian political spectrum in Macedonia. Ahmeti reportedly told Berisha that, in spite of his party's reservations about developments in Macedonia, DUI considered Macedonia's integration into NATO to be extremely important and would continue to maintain a constructive attitude in support of receiving a NATO invitation.

¶3. (SBU) The DUI Chairman also said that his party would support the government in Skopje to ensure stability ahead of the NATO summit. Sources from the Prime Minister's office who were present at the meeting indicated that Ahmeti's attitude was positive, unlike the aggressive tone he demonstrated during his last meeting with Berisha. Ahmeti also expressed optimism that the dispute between Macedonia and Greece over the name issue could be resolved and would not become a stumbling block for entry in NATO. Berisha is reported to have told Ahmeti that Albania supports civil dialogue and cooperation between the Albanian political parties in Macedonia. Berisha also stressed that it is important for Albanians across the region to show that they are able to hold orderly political elections.

¶4. (U) During his stay in Tirana, Ahmeti also met with President Topi, Speaker Topalli, and also Socialist Party Chairman Edi Rama and LSI Chairman Ilir Meta of the opposition. Meetings with these leaders focused on the Gerdec explosion, political developments in Albania, support for Macedonia's and Albania's integration into NATO and the implementation of the Ohrid agreement. Opposition leader Rama called on the Macedonian political leaders to resolve "the

issue over the name quickly so that there is no obstacle for the integration into NATO." LSI leader Meta said that Macedonia's recognition of Kosovo's independence would provide an important contribution for peace and stability in the region.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) Ahmeti's visit and confidential discussions with Prime Minister Berisha demonstrate the importance that the Albanian Government places on developments in Macedonia and serve to again showcase Albania's sustained constructive policy towards its eastern neighbor. While the Albanian Prime Minister has been bogged down in a domestic crisis following the Gerdec explosion, his meeting with Ahmeti and earlier statement in support of the agreement reached between the PDSH and the Macedonian Prime Minister (March 24, 2008) demonstrate Berisha's continued personal interest and engagement with developments within the Albanian political scene in Macedonia. Meetings earlier in the month with Menduh Thaci and now with Ahmeti also show that the Albanian Government under Berisha is adhering to the policy pursued by consecutive Albanian governments in recent years of maintaining equally good ties with the two main Albanian political parties in Macedonia.

WITHERS